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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7543rd meeting

Tuesday, 27 October 2015, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Gombo
	Chile	Ms. Sapag Muñoz de la Peña
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mrs. Jakubonė
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/813)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/813)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/813, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: The members of the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2139 (2014) in February 2014 in recognition of the magnitude of the human cost this conflict carried. The purpose and intent of the resolution was clear and unambiguous — to seek protection for civilians caught in the midst of the fighting, to ensure that civilian facilities and infrastructure were not attacked, and to compel the parties to enable unimpeded access for humanitarians trying to reach people in desperate need of assistance. The 20 reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the Council since the adoption of the resolution highlight the parties' contempt — month after month — for the Council's resolution and their minimum legal obligations under international law.

The failure of the parties to uphold the basic tenets of international humanitarian and human rights law has propelled the Syrian people to levels of tragedy and despair that could barely have been imagined five years ago. By any measure, the situation in Syria has worsened since the beginning of the year. We now estimate that some 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of some form of protection and humanitarian assistance throughout the country — an increase of some 1.2 million in just 10 months. More than 6 million of those in need are children.

This is one of the largest displacement crises of modern times. Fighting and violence have forced over half of the people in Syria from their homes in a period of just over four years, many of them multiple times. There are now some 6.5 million people displaced inside Syria. In addition, nearly 4.2 million have fled the country, with neighbouring countries in the region bearing an enormous burden. An increasing number of Syrians fleeing the war and violence are willing to risk everything aboard unseaworthy boats and dinghies to reach Europe; of the 680,000 arrivals by sea in the Mediterranean in 2015, over 50 per cent are Syrian. They have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination.

The rising levels of fighting and violence over the past few weeks have had an enormous humanitarian impact, resulting in large-scale death, injury and displacement to civilians, particularly in northern Syria. Indiscriminate attacks on civilian-populated areas continue with impunity. In Aleppo city, for example, pro-Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups have continued mutual shelling inside civilian-populated areas, with hundreds killed and injured in September. Meanwhile, clashes erupted in the city in late September between the Kurdish People's Protection Units, the Al-Nusra Front and non-State armed opposition groups, resulting in multiple civilian deaths and temporarily impacting humanitarian access to eastern Aleppo city. On 23 October, the main access route from Hama to western Aleppo city was cut due to an offensive by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We are very concerned at this development, which places at further risk some 700,000 people living in the western part of the city.

The latest estimates indicate that over 120,000 people have been displaced in northern Syria since early October as a result of aerial bombardment and ground offensives among the parties. This includes some 45,000 people displaced from the southern outskirts of Aleppo city to relatively safer areas to the west and south following a Government forces offensive over the past week. Meanwhile, approximately 80,000 people have been displaced from northern Hama and

southern Idlib governorates to relatively safer parts of these governorates since early October following an offensive by Government forces. Elsewhere in Syria, thousands more have been displaced in Homs, rural Damascus and Deir ez-Zor governorates over the past few weeks.

The pace of displacement in Syria remains relentless. Well over 1.2 million people have been displaced so far this year, many for the second or third time. Further displacement is expected to continue at a similar rate unless there is an end to the fighting.

Attacks on health facilities and health workers also remain relentless. The United Nations and partners have recorded attacks on five hospitals in Hama, Idlib and Aleppo governorates since the launch of recent offensives, leading to a number of casualties and their immediate closure due to severe infrastructural damage, exacerbating an already dire situation for civilians living in these areas. Since the start of the conflict, Physicians for Human Rights has documented attacks on at least 313 medical facilities and the deaths of 679 medical workers. Such attacks should cease immediately; parties to the conflict must ensure respect for and the protection of health facilities, workers and patients under international humanitarian law.

While we know where those considered to be most vulnerable are located, humanitarian organizations are still not able to get sustained, unimpeded access to millions of affected people. Latest estimates indicate that some 4.5 million people are living in hard-to-reach areas. Despite our best efforts, we have been able to reach only a small fraction of people living in these areas in 2015 as a result of active conflict, shifting front-lines, bureaucratic hurdles and conditions imposed by the parties.

The parties to the conflict continue to use siege as a weapon of war in Syria. Following a comprehensive review, we now estimate that some 393,700 people are living under siege in Syria, including some 200,000 people in Deir ez-Zor city, besieged by ISIL; some 181,200 people besieged by the Syrian Government in various locations in eastern Ghutah, as well as Darayya and Zabadani in rural Damascus; and some 12,500 people besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Al-Nusrah Front in Foah and Kefraya in Idlib. The 26,500 people in Nubul and Zahra, in Aleppo governorate, are no longer considered besieged following consistent and credible reports that access to and from the enclave for people and commercial goods have significantly improved over the past three months, although access remains challenging and protection concerns acute.

Access to besieged areas remains pitiful and wholly insufficient. So far in 2015, the United Nations has been able to reach only 3.6 per cent of people with health assistance and only 0.5 per cent of people with food per month in besieged areas.

Last week, humanitarian operations began under the framework of the ceasefire agreement covering Zabadani, Madaya, Foah, Kefraya and neighbouring towns, reached in Istanbul on 22 September with the facilitation of the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria. On 18 October, 31 trucks delivered medical and humanitarian supplies simultaneously to 29,500 people in Madaya, as well as the besieged areas of Zabadani, Foah and Kefraya. A joint convoy of the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross accompanied 23 SARC trucks to rural Damascus, where two trucks crossed into Zabadani and 21 more entered Madaya and Buqayn, hosting many people displaced from Zabadani. Eight trucks delivered a proportional amount of health, food, nutrition, non-food items and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies to Foah and Kefraya via a United Nations cross-border operation through Turkey's Bab al-Hawa border point, with the support of the Idlib branch of the SARC. The United Nations and its partners stand ready to immediately implement the remaining points covered under the agreement, including the delivery of additional humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of the critically wounded. This complex mission shows once again that when there is the political will, there is a way to improve the situation for civilians trapped in conflict in Syria.

Even as the political and military situation evolves, the immediate priority for humanitarian organizations remains reaching all people in need wherever they may be found in Syria. To do this, we must have sustained, predictable and unimpeded access throughout the country. While I welcome the continued progress made on visas for United Nations staff members by the Syrian authorities, this must be followed by urgent and significant progress in other areas. So far this year, only 23 of the 85 convoy requests made by the United Nations have been approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and fewer than half of those approved have been able to actually proceed due

to a combination of lack of final security clearances from Syrian authorities, lack of safe passage from non-State armed opposition groups, and insecurity.

I once again call upon the Syrian authorities to urgently approve the 46 currently pending inter-agency convoy requests and to allow convoys previously agreed in principle, which are awaiting their clearance, to proceed. I also call on Non-State Armed Groups, as well as listed terrorist groups, to allow the deliveries they are preventing. We would be able to reach an additional 1.5 million people in dire need of assistance in hard-to-reach and besieged locations through these inter-agency convoys if approvals and safe passage were granted.

We all need to guard against becoming numb to the impact of this conflict, given the vast numbers and the sense of political impasse. Yet recent developments in Syria are a telling reminder that it is ordinary women, men and children who continue to bear the brunt of this conflict. Living conditions in all areas of the country continue to deteriorate sharply. Entire neighbourhoods and communities are at risk from explosive weapons; over 11 million people are in need of health assistance, including 25,000 trauma cases per month; nearly 9 million are unable to meet their basic food needs; 70 per cent of the population are without regular access to safe drinking water amid continuing water cuts; schools and hospitals are attacked; and poverty and unemployment are rampant amid rising prices. Winter is fast approaching and is likely to further exacerbate the situation for many families.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners will continue to respond to the growing needs to the best of their ability. While we are reaching millions of people per month, we continue to try and find ways to scale up life-saving assistance throughout Syria in an extremely complex and insecure environment. Humanitarian workers are putting their lives on the line, but remain undeterred. I strongly encourage donors to maintain, and where possible increase their generous support for life-saving humanitarian operations, as well as recovery and resilience activities, in 2016.

As I have said to the Council before, the crisis urgently requires a political solution that addresses the root causes of the conflict and meets the aspirations of the Syrian people, who have suffered for far too long. In the absence of such a solution, I sincerely hope that the Council and relevant Member States will continue to use their influence with the parties to the conflict in order to remind them to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid further civilian injury and loss of life.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

Albert Einstein once said that insanity was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Today, 60 years after Einstein's death, it seems that some Governments are still not familiar with that reality. They continue to repeat their mistakes and miscalculations and to expect different outcomes. It is undeniable that interference in countries' domestic affairs leads only to the destruction of the country concerned, creates humanitarian crises, leads to chaos and devastation and creates fertile ground for terrorism and murderers. That is clear from the destruction of Iraq, Libya and other countries. Foreign interference has brought us Daesh, the Al-Nusra Front, the Khorasan group and other groups. Terrorists now have a State — a caliphate, as some like to call it.

In spite of all that, failing to adhere to Einstein's logic, certain States continue to press on with the implementation of this deadly recipe in Syria, using the same slogans, even as everyone else has realized that the resulting devastation is more than clear. Tony Blair, former Head of the British Government, has said, 12 years after the British-American invasion of Iraq, that that act of aggression was based on erroneous and false information. Fourteen years after the terrorist attack against the World Trade Center in New York, we see that the strategy adopted in the context of the war on terrorism has created hundreds of Bin Ladens, instead of getting rid of just one Bin Laden. Instead of just one Al-Qaida in Afghanistan, we have dozens of groups throughout the world that have adopted its doctrine. Terrorism has now come to those who support it.

A look at the humanitarian situation reveals the same thing: the stubbornness of some to carry out the same misguided policies while expecting different results is more than evident. Some claim to want to remedy the humanitarian crisis in Syria, but they refuse to prioritize the fight against terrorism. They

continue to impose unilateral economic measures against the Syrian people. They continue to deny the Syrian Government its role, refusing to coordinate their efforts with it in providing humanitarian assistance and combating terrorism. Five years since the crisis began, today it is absolutely clear to everyone that this policy has failed to resolve the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, it is undeniable that it has aggravated the crisis and worsened the suffering of the Syrian people, forcing a large part of the population to become refugees or internally displaced persons. It is therefore essential to change the way in which we address the situation, if we want to have different results, that is, to tangibly improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. To do so, we need to take the following steps.

First and foremost, the main reason for the crisis has to be resolved, namely, the creation and spread of terrorism supported from abroad. That requires the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015), in collaboration with and with the cooperation of the Government of Syria. Those who believe that cooperating with the Government is beneath them, whose sole interest is to undermine the Syrian Government, President and army and who prefer to deal with the demons of terrorism rather than with the Government in order to tackle those demons are creating an absurd situation that has nothing to do with the rules of sane behaviour and thinking, nor with the principles of political science and strategy.

This absurd situation has led to the presence in Syria and Iraq of tens of thousands of foreign fighters from more than 100 countries — as illustrated in the nine reports of the Security Council Committees on Al-Qaida and Counter-Terrorism, among other places. Daesh, the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups did not emerge from a vacuum. They were nurtured, financed and trained. Their travel was facilitated via airports and across borders. They were given visas. Through Turkish intermediaries, they have even been allowed to engage in trade in oil and gas. It is therefore necessary to end the practice by the Governments of some States of continuing to fund, arm and train terrorists. We cannot talk about ending Syria's pain and ending the crisis and at the same time maintain a deafening silence in the face of Turkey and Jordan using their territories to allow the passage of foreign terrorists and mercenaries, or while Saudi Arabia and Qatar support terrorism with great generosity, rather than promoting the financing of the humanitarian plan, which is only 37 per cent funded — in spite of the various pro forma conferences held here and there for that purpose — and at a time when the United States has spent half a billion dollars, which would be enough to close the gap, as part of its programme to train and equip the "moderate" opposition, which now includes just five groups, the Al-Nusra Front having regained its weapons thanks to the United States.

The issue of combating terrorism brings me to the second element necessary for ending the humanitarian crisis, namely, supporting a political solution. Fighting terrorism will contribute to the success of a political solution, which must include a dialogue among Syrians, under Syrian leadership, without external interference and with full respect for the sovereignty and independence of Syria, as well as its unity and territorial integrity. That is in line with the provisions of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, as well as the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

In that regard, I would like to recall that the Government of Syria announced in the General Assembly, via its Minister for Foreign Affairs (see A/70/PV.25), its agreement to participate in the working group proposed by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, based on our belief that a political solution is the only way to resolve the crisis. The problem lies with the other parties, who do not want such a solution to be reached. That was also the case with regard to Mr. De Mistura's suggestion following the Geneva II conference for a cessation of fighting in the city of Aleppo, as well as with regard to the Kofi Annan plan. In spite of all that, there are still some who unfairly say that the Syrian Government is refusing a political solution. Meanwhile, they protect the very parties who have refused Mr. De Mistura's initiatives.

We have reviewed the report (S/2015/813) of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). It is a biased and politicized report, with many gaps and falsehoods. We have transmitted two letters in that regard to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. I shall limit myself to saying that the report fails to draw attention to the fact that the forces of the so-called coalition have targeted innocent civilians as well as infrastructure in Syria, including roads, bridges, refineries, schools and hospitals. Also targeted was a power station in western Aleppo, the only one in

the entire city. In addition, a centre for children with special needs in Raqa was destroyed, killing dozens of innocent children, under the pretext that Daesh was the target. Since the beginning of the coalition airstrikes, we have seen greater numbers of Daesh terrorists brought from abroad and the expansion of their areas of influence. Thus we are surprised that the report uses misleading accounts that are of unknown source, have no credibility, and seek only to fish in troubled waters and cast shadows over the joint Russian-Syrian efforts under way to tackle Daesh, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups, on the basis of a request from the Syrian Government and the Charter of the United Nations, which has led to the retreat of terrorist groups in more than one place and forced them to withdraw from several areas that were under their control.

We have said in the past that the term "non-State armed opposition groups" is unacceptable and runs counter to what we are seeing on the ground in Syria. It also goes against what the Security Council's own sanctions committee describes. What the report describes as non-State armed opposition groups are, in fact, the Army of Conquest, which was created by Turkey and which includes elements of Ahrar Al-Sham and the Al-Nusra Front. Simple math — one plus one equals two — makes clear that the Army of Islam plus the Army of Conquest equals the Al-Nusra Front, which is on the list of terrorist entities. The Army of Islam, which is active in rural Damascus, includes mercenaries from Chechnya, other countries of the Caucasus and elsewhere who are financed by the Saudi Arabian secret service and have declared their allegiance to Daesh.

The Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, financed and run by a joint Arab-American operations room in Amman, includes 8,000 Jordanian Salafists and thousands of other terrorists.. Al-Nusra Front terrorists, openly supported by Israel, are attacking the peacekeeping forces in the Golan and have abducted Filipino and Fijian soldiers. They not only receive support but are also given medical attention by Israel.

All of this is summarized in a report of the Secretary-General under "non-State armed opposition"; but are these not foreign mercenaries?

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.